



Australian Government

# **PROBLEM GAMBLING**

## **HELP FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**



## Up to 500,000 Australians have, or are at risk of having, a serious problem with gambling.

Many people can gamble away their entire income. And when that happens, it's not just about the money. It's the harm they cause to themselves and their family.

If you're concerned about the gambling habits of a loved one and want to hear first-hand experiences of this difficult journey, then read on. You'll also find resources for taking the next step and getting help.



### What is problem gambling?

Many Australians enjoy an occasional flutter. But for some, gambling can be highly destructive – ruining lives and destroying families. People affected by problem gambling find themselves starting to bet more than they can afford to lose; carrying feelings of guilt; lying about or covering up the extent of their gambling.

*"Mary would go to buy some groceries and come back four hours later. She would make excuses about the traffic being heavy, or say the shop had run out of certain items. Of course we now know she was gambling. When I think about it now, it was so obvious something was going on." (Paul, husband of a problem gambler)*

As the problem escalates, unpaid bills start to accumulate. Money is borrowed or sometimes stolen. They gamble until every dollar is gone. They try to stop but they can't.

*"I probably realised [I had a problem] when I would go in and I could say I can afford to lose \$20 that's fine but then I would stay and keep waiting to regain what I lost. Then leaving, feeling really bad. It's the light, the music, the jingles, the free drinks. Why didn't I stop myself?" (Maureen, problem gambler<sup>HoC</sup>)*

In these cases, gambling causes harm not only to the person affected by problem gambling, but also to you, their family and friends. Like an insidious disease, it eventually infiltrates every part of their life – physical health, emotional wellbeing, work, finances and relationships.

*"One night I had gone through \$4,000. I had a packet of Valium and a packet of Seropax. I couldn't tell [my husband] how much I had lost, so I took all of the tablets. He took me to hospital and at that stage he didn't know why I had taken the tablets." (Patricia, problem gambler<sup>HoC</sup>)*

### Further information

If you think a loved one may be affected by problem gambling, visit the [Gambling Help Online](#) website or call **1800 858 858**.

#### REALITY CHECK

- There are two main types of gambling: betting on lotteries, scratchies, poker machines, casino table games and keno; and wagering, which is betting on the outcome of a contest or event, including racing and sports betting.
- Three quarters of people with a gambling problem play poker machines.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report no. 50, p. 13.

## How common is problem gambling?

For most people, gambling is a form of entertainment that is enjoyed responsibly. In fact, many Australians gamble at least once a year, whether it's an occasional bet at the races, buying a lottery ticket, playing the pokies or a night out at the casino.

However, some people can experience significant harm from gambling. It is estimated there are up to 160,000 Australians who have a serious problem with gambling, and 360,000 people who are at risk of developing a problem.<sup>2</sup>

Three quarters of people affected by problem gambling play poker machines. Some poker machines can be played at an extremely high intensity – you can lose \$1500 in just 60 minutes. And it happens so easily. The very design of poker machines is to seduce players into spending more money and time than they intended.<sup>3</sup>

People affected by problem gambling are found in all age groups, income groups, cultures and jobs.

*"They're right across the board. Doctors and people who work in factories. People who have academic qualifications and first grade football players. Single parents. People who have very little money, people who have a lot of money. It can hit anyone." (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)*

The effects of problem gambling ripple through families, friends, work colleagues and employers, impacting up to five million people each year.

The social cost to the community is estimated to be at least \$4.7 billion a year.

*"The impact of problem gambling is not just on the gambler. There's a statistic floating around of between seven and 10 people are impacted for every problem gambler. And I have no doubt that's true. I look at the relationships that I've had while I was gambling, my family, my colleagues at work, they were all impacted." (Thomas, reformed problem gambler)*

### Further information

For further details on the prevalence of problem gambling in Australia, read the Productivity Commission's report into gambling<sup>4</sup> (Chapter 5).

#### REALITY CHECK

- More people in Australia have a gambling problem than are admitted to hospital for traffic accidents each year.<sup>5</sup>
- \$19 billion was spent on gambling in 2008–09 in Australia. \$11.9 billion of that amount was spent playing poker machines.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report no. 50, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 11.3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Chapter 5

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 6

## Signs of problem gambling

Most people affected by problem gambling hide the extent of their problem. Many friends and family say they knew something was wrong, but not what was wrong, which makes it difficult to confront and tackle the issue.

*“She was more standoffish, didn’t want to be near me, didn’t want to talk and when I’d approach her about where she was for the last three hours when she said she was going to be home, it escalated fairly quickly. And so the whole atmosphere of the relationship changed quite drastically.” (Peter, husband of recovered problem gambler)*

Here are some of the signs you may have been noticing.

### Money clues

A person affected by problem gambling can become secretive about money, and when questioned it often leads to a fight. It is important that you assess your financial situation. How much money do you think has been lost? Which debts are in joint names?

*“We started to have a lot more fights about money and we hardly ever had fights previously.” (Peter, husband of recovered problem gambler)*

If you are being contacted by creditors, constantly receiving disconnection notices, or feel that money is always short for no reason, make an appointment to see a financial counsellor.

*“We had constant troubles making ends meet.” (Angelica, wife of problem gambler)*



It is not uncommon for a person affected by problem gambling to hide bank and credit card statements. If you suspect this is the case, enquire as to where they are.

*“Quite often the person with the gambling problem has a post office box so the statements for credit cards and other things don’t come to the home.” (Elizabeth, financial counsellor)*

A common excuse is that the person affected by problem gambling has to stay back at work. They may even take on an extra job, but you don’t see any extra money.

*“I just couldn’t ignore how well my girlfriends were going. Their husbands worked in the same business as Reggie and had the same jobs. Their houses were beautiful. Mine was full of broken stuff, including me.” (Fran, wife of a problem gambler)*

### Emotional clues

Family violence is more common when families are in crisis. Problem gambling can create tension at home, frequent arguments or even violence. If this is happening, get help straight away. Visit the Gambling Online website or call 1800 858 858 to find the nearest support options.

*“The kids were exposed to a lot of anger and violence and arguments. I think that was worse than not having enough food.” (Jeffrey, ex-partner of a problem gambler<sup>HOC</sup>)*

A person affected by problem gambling can feel anxious or depressed when they are losing money and juggling bills. This can result in mood swings and sudden outbursts of anger.

*"Sometimes she worked very well with the kids and got on well with them, and at other times it was very tense and the kids just couldn't do anything right. They moved away from her. She just wasn't the same person I'd married anymore." (Peter, husband recovered problem gambler).*

Having to constantly cover up lies and losses can leave a person affected by problem gambling feeling isolated and alone. They can become withdrawn from family and friends.

*"As a mother I wasn't the loving and caring person that I should have been. I have to live with the fact that I missed out on school concerts and if I went I didn't enjoy them, because I wanted to be somewhere else." (Gabriella, recovered problem gambler)*

## Behaviour clues

Sadly, problem gambling is often about telling lies, covering up, scheming and scamming in order to hide the extent of the problem from their family and friends. A person affected by problem gambling can become very defensive when questioned.

*"I knew I was doing the wrong thing, lying, cheating, stealing, but I just couldn't control it. I kept hoping Jessie would find out and make it all better for me. I was such a fool." (Jason, problem gambler)*

People affected by problem gambling are four times more likely to have problems with alcohol and four times as likely to smoke daily than people not affected by problem gambling.<sup>7</sup> You may also see more frequent use of alcohol and drugs.

*"Drinking and gambling ruined both my marriages; there is no doubt about that." (Rex, problem gambler<sup>HOC</sup>)*

Frequently, a person affected by problem gambling can be absent for long periods or constantly late home without any real excuse. You may sense that they are lying or covering up when you ask where they have been.

*"I will send [my partner] to the supermarket two minutes away to get a couple of things and he will come back 45 minutes later and say there was a big queue. But I will know where he has been." (Jackie, partner of a problem gambler)*

## Further information

You may like to review the **Canadian Problem Gambling Index**<sup>8</sup> — a useful tool for indicating problem gambling.

### REALITY CHECK

- People affected by problem gambling lose around \$21,000 each year, which is around one third of what the average Australian earns in a year.<sup>9</sup>
- More than one-third of people affected by problem gambling have a mental illness.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Shane A. Thomas and Alun C. Jackson 2008, *Report to beyondblue, Risk and protective factors, depression and comorbidities in problem gambling.*

<sup>8</sup> [www.problemgambling.ca/EN/Documents/ProblemGamblingSeverityIndex.pdf](http://www.problemgambling.ca/EN/Documents/ProblemGamblingSeverityIndex.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, *Average Weekly Earnings*, February 2010

<sup>10</sup> Shane A. Thomas and Alun C. Jackson 2008, *Report to beyondblue, Risk and protective factors, depression and comorbidities in problem gambling*, p ix

## Impact of problem gambling on relationships

The impact of problem gambling may extend beyond financial problems. A person affected by problem gambling can cause harm to themselves and their family. They may suffer mental and physical health problems, find it difficult to hold down a job, and struggle to maintain relationships. It can be a difficult journey through uncertainty, stress, anger, isolation, loss of trust and sometimes violence.

There can be utter devastation when realising the magnitude of the problem and the financial loss.

*"I saw the bank manager to ask how we could manage our money better. What he told me absolutely shocked me. We had two mortgages on our home and with the downturn in property prices, we probably owed more than the house was worth. Thirty years of work for nothing." (Janie, wife of problem gambler)*

Many partners of people affected by problem gambling start to blame themselves.

*"I was a fool for trusting him. I am angry about it ... but I am also angry with myself for being so stupid." (Janie, wife of problem gambler)*

In some cases, relationships simply do not survive. People affected by problem gambling are six times more likely to be divorced than others.<sup>11</sup>

*"We have separated now and have been for 12 months and [my ex-wife] still gambles. It was very destructive. I don't like the disruption it makes to families and I don't like the way it turns people into liars. It brings so much stress and anxiety to family life and everyone suffers." (Jeffrey, ex-partner, poker machines<sup>HoC</sup>)*

Others, however, do manage to tackle the problem together, and as a result their relationship can grow stronger.

*"The money wasn't the biggest issue. It was our relationship and who she became when she was gambling. I was very close to getting a divorce a couple of times. I'm very pleased today that I didn't. It was a slow process, and it didn't happen overnight. But I'm glad that we did make that commitment." (Peter, husband of recovered problem gambler)*

### Further information

For information on how you can cope with the impact of problem gambling, visit **Gambling Help Online**.

For information on depression, anxiety, available treatments and referrals to relevant services, contact **beyondblue**.

For crisis support, contact **Lifeline**. (See page 18 for contact details.)

### REALITY CHECK

- People affected by problem gambling are six times more likely to be divorced than others.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Problem Gambling Treatment and Research Centre 2010, *Children at Risk of developing problem gambling*, May 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, S and Jackson, A. 2008, *Report to beyondblue. Risk and protective factors: depression and comorbidities in problem gambling*.



## Impact of problem gambling on children

Children growing up in a family where there is a gambling problem are at greater risk of developing emotional and social problems than other children. They often have to deal with many issues. Children often know there is less money for food, clothing, family outings and school activities. The effects of poverty can hit hard.

*"We were always the last to pay anything we all had old, worn school uniforms. We used to have some Christmases with toast as the main course because Dad had found Mum's savings tin." (Damian, son of a problem gambler)*

*"The kids have gone hungry and gone without and that's where I have realised that it's not right." (Josephine, problem gambler <sup>HoC</sup>)*

Often, children can experience feelings of guilt, and feel that they have in some way contributed to the problems of the parent and the family.

Your child may become reluctant to invite friends over for a play, particularly if there is significant fighting and tension in the home.

*"No-one ever came to visit because we were too ashamed. We couldn't have fed them if they did." (Damian, son of a problem gambler)*

Children may stop trusting the parent affected by problem gambling. This can stem from promises being made and constantly broken, through to finding out their parent has been stealing money from them.

*"As a result of all of this, I've lost ... my 14 year old's trust because I have gone through her bank account and cleaned it out. She earns her own money and I will go into her room when she goes to school and grab every cent I can and I am off down to those pokies again. Now when she gets her money she goes out and spends it on whatever junk she can find because she knows mum will get it if she doesn't." (Josephine, problem gambler <sup>HoC</sup>)*

Many children are conscious of the sometimes excessive time a person affected by problem gambling spends away from home. Lost time is often a regret that stays with a person who has recovered from problem gambling.

*"My children and husband have forgiven me. I have forgiven myself. But nobody can give me the time back." (Gabriela, recovered problem gambler)*

Children are usually aware of the high levels of conflict in the home, and can be exposed to a volatile and confusing environment.

*"The kids were exposed to a lot of anger and violence and arguments so I think that was worse than not having enough food." (Jeffrey, ex-partner of a problem gambler)*



## How to talk to children about problem gambling

Children can respond differently to the impact of problem gambling in the home, but in most cases, they are aware of the lack of money and the level of tension and stress in the home. It is important that you bring the issue out in the open and let your children know you are trying to sort things out. Reinforce that they are not to blame.

Communicate with children simply and in a way they will understand.

- Use language and explanations that your child will understand. For younger children, the message may be "Daddy likes to play games and he is losing money. We are trying to help him fix that."

Encourage your child to talk.

- Stay silent while your child is speaking and listen carefully to what your child has to say.
- Encourage them to contribute.

Ask open ended questions.

- What do you think?
- How do you feel?
- Can you tell me a little more?

Keep the discussion focussed and brief.

- Turn the television off, and find a quiet place to talk.
- Talk regularly, but keep it brief.
- Don't try to solve everything at once.

Things you may notice:

- decline in school performance
- withdrawal from family, friends or activities
- difficulties in sleeping
- being angry, anxious or suffering from mood swings

### REALITY CHECK

- Children with parents who are affected by problem gambling are up to ten times more likely than other children to develop gambling problems themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Problem Gambling Treatment and Research Centre 2010, *Children at risk of developing problem gambling*, May 2010

## What you can do

### Look after your health

It is important that you look after your own health and well-being and consider seeking support to help you through this difficult time. This may be face-to-face or online counselling, financial advice, or peer support programs such as Gam Anon or self-help groups. If you are feeling stressed, anxious or depressed, speak to your family doctor or another health care professional.

Recognise you are not alone. The actions of a person affected by problem gambling negatively impacts the lives of between five and 10 others. This means there are up to five million Australians who could be impacted by problem gambling each year, including friends, family and employers of people with a gambling problem.<sup>14</sup>

*“The best advice I could give to family members is you are not alone. There are services to help you and the problem gambler. It’s not easy, but people recover every day. While they may relapse, each time something new is learned that can help in the future.” (Chandler, problem gambling counsellor)*



Learn more about problem gambling, which will help you feel more confident in managing the situation and give you the skills to support your partner through recovery.

*“We discussed it and eventually she came and told me that she had a problem with the poker machine. My simple solution was, well just don’t go, but of course, it’s not that simple. It’s not something that you can turn on and off that easily once the person is addicted.” (Peter, husband of recovered problem gambler)*

Many partners feel angry with themselves that they didn’t realise there was a problem – or appreciate the extent of the problem – earlier. Don’t be too hard on yourself. Someone affected by problem gambling can become very good at lying, at covering up, and are usually in denial.

*“Even though the partner will say I didn’t know it was happening, there’s always been this element of I knew there was something there I just couldn’t put my finger on it. When you’re dealing with people with drinking or drug problems there’s always a visible sign that there’s been a problem with a substance. With gambling its silent, it can go on for a number of years.” (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)*

### How you can support someone affected by problem gambling

Many people affected by problem gambling have successfully beaten their addiction because of the support they have had from families and friends.

*“I am lucky that I have a good partner and she manages the bills, even though I have still taken the money. If it wasn’t for her I don’t know where I would be.” (Mark, problem gambler<sup>HoC</sup>)*

Your ongoing involvement in the treatment of the person affected by problem gambling can impact the outcome. It can be hard to support someone who has caused you so much pain and stress, so remember to also focus on the support you need for your own recovery.

*“We prefer to treat the family. A lot of our clients initially find this a challenge because it involves them in honesty in communication that has often vanished from their relationships. But we find those who overcome that initial hurdle really value the support in their recovery.” (David, problem gambling counsellor)*

<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report no 50

People can recover from a gambling problem, but it does require hard work and there will be setbacks along the way. Recognise the small steps, and focus on the bigger picture.

*“Once that phone call is made that recovery has already started. By the time they’re sitting in front of me they’ve progressed so far and sometimes they need to be reminded of that, about how much has been achieved already.”*  
(Peter, problem gambling counsellor)

Research suggests that problem gambling significantly elevates the risk of suicide.<sup>15</sup> Seek immediate help if the person affected by problem gambling expresses thoughts of suicide.

*“About 70 per cent of people who’ve come in for treatment have had suicidal ideation as part of their struggle with this problem. It’s an issue that I tell the family and friends that they need to confront. If the problem gambler is expressing suicidal thoughts they need to do something about it and not run from it, not hide from it. They need to seek help with the other person or irrespective of the other person.”* (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)

You will need to have some very difficult conversations with the person affected by problem gambling. While these are likely to be hurtful, emotional and stressful, try to talk about the problem rationally and without it turning into a heated discussion. Carefully choose the timing of your conversations.

*“There’s a need from the family and friends to not turn this into a yelling, screaming match. To talk about it calmly. And that can be extremely difficult, particularly when issues of trust have been broken so many times.”* (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)

## Take control of the finances

Free financial counselling is available to people affected by problem gambling, their friends and family through various health and community organisations. If your loved one is wanting to change, attend counselling together. To find out what to expect in financial counselling, watch Elizabeth’s video at [www.problemgambling.gov.au/resources/](http://www.problemgambling.gov.au/resources/).

If the person affected by problem gambling is not open to change, you still have the right to protect your family’s money and assets. Consider taking some of these steps.

A common source of money for a person affected by problem gambling is a draw down facility on the mortgage. You need to defend your home – talk to your bank about your options.

*“I had a house... and I sold it and with the intentions of buying another house, but most of it went in the pokies. I put a minimum deposit on another house and lost that as well.”* (Julia, recovered problem gambler)

*“This lady sat in my office and cried and cried. I explained that because it was a joint loan, she was liable for the debt. It was heart-wrenching and one I won’t forget. She ended up having to go bankrupt herself because the partner had gambled that money.”* (Elizabeth, financial counsellor)

Talk to the person affected by problem gambling about your desire to minimise their access to money. Even if they are not agreeable, you have every right to minimise the money supply, and monitor it closely.

Talk to your bank about protecting cheque and savings accounts, credit cards, lines of credit and other avenues.



<sup>15</sup> Monash University 2008, *Report to beyondblue: Risk and protective factors, depression and co-morbidities in problem gambling*, p 26.

*"I often think if I had put the same creative thought into a business that I put into how to get money after we made so many arrangements of limiting the access to money, I would be a millionaire by now. For example, I had a card to pay for medical bills and so I would go to the doctor and then I would go to Medicare and get the cash out and put straight into the pokies." (Gabriella, recovered problem gambler)*

The more debt a person affected by problem gambling accumulates, the more elaborate methods they will employ to access money. This may include selling family possessions.

*"I would sell bits and pieces, or my washing machine to make up for it." (Anna, problem gambler<sup>HoC</sup>)*

People affected by problem gambling are often convinced their loss is only a temporary setback, and the next big win is around the corner. All that's needed is some extra cash. Tell family, friends and co-workers not to lend the person money.

*"I rang my brother to get more money to play pokies and I lied to him and said I needed to pay a bill and to deposit five hundred dollars into my account." (Julia, recovered problem gambler).*

If the person affected by problem gambling has made the decision to stop gambling, talk to them about granting you or another family member or friend power of attorney and control over finances.

### **More information**

For more information on what you can do, visit the **Gambling Help Online** website (see page 18).

To speak to a financial counsellor, or find a financial counsellor near you, phone 1800 007 007.

## Where you can go for support

### Counselling

The first port of call for many family, friends and people affected by problem gambling is counselling. There is a range of free counselling services available throughout Australia, including online counselling, email support services, and face-to-face sessions with counsellors.

Visit the **Gambling Help Online** website (see page 18) for further information on these services, or to find a counsellor near you.

*“If someone is struggling to see any way out, my advice would be that there is support. There are a lot of people who won’t judge, and there are so many services now that can help, they’re anonymous, they’re friendly, they’re very experienced. Without fail they are all just wonderful, magnificent people and the work they do is incredible. My main message is that getting help is the start of getting your life back.” (Thomas, recovered problem gambler)*

### Relationship counselling

Problem gambling can test relationships to their very core. For a healthy relationship to return, it is important to restore trust. But trust is fragile, and is difficult for the strongest of partnerships to re-establish once it has been lost. With commitment, it can come back. Relationship counselling can help. Contact **Family Relationships Online** on 1800 050 321 or at visit [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au).

*“The trust issue is the last thing to come back into the relationship. I encourage family members to love the gambler and not necessarily trust them, and to be aware that that’s OK. For the gambler I encourage them to realise that they’re being loved and that the trust will come back.” (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)*

### Support groups

There are two main support groups for both people affected by problem gambling and their family and friends.

**Gamblers Anonymous** is a self-help program open to anyone affected by problem gambling.

**Gam-Anon** is a self-help group providing support to partners, families or significant others of a person affected by problem gambling. (See page 18 for contact details.)

*“When I stopped playing the pokies I came to a group called Pokies Anonymous. All the people in the group are just like myself, ex-gamblers or gamblers, people that can’t stop, people that have stopped.*

*There’s no judgments, we’re all the same. I couldn’t wait to get the one month certificate, the two month certificate and then get a cake at one year and it was all positive encouragement.” (Julia, recovered problem gambler)*



## Financial Counselling

Financial counselling services helps people in personal financial difficulty to address their financial problems and make informed choices. Financial counsellors are professional staff with specialist training and qualifications, provide direct casework (e.g. provision of advice and information); advocacy and/or negotiation; referral; community education; telephone financial counselling and networking/liaison.

The national 1800 007 007 financial counselling helpline provides access to free financial counselling for people in financial hardship located anywhere across the country. Please note that calls to 1800 007 007 from public phones/mobile phones may be timed and charged at a higher rate.

## More information

Contact the **Gambling Impact Society** (see page 18) for further self-help information and resources.

### REALITY CHECK

- Only 8-15 per cent of people affected by problem gambling seek help in any one year.<sup>16</sup> So while encouraging your loved one to get support won't be easy, it is an important step on the road to recovery. Know that reticence is common, and you're not alone.

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<sup>16</sup> Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report no 50, p. 73.

## The process of change

People affected by problem gambling – or any other addiction – typically go through six stages of change. These are not always linear, and there can be relapses or setbacks, but recognise this is all part of the process of recovery.

*“She was making attempts to resolve the problem and she was working hard at it, but not always successfully. My philosophy was, as long as she is working at it and that she makes two, three steps forward then the occasional one step back we can live with as long as they become less frequent, and as long as the general direction was right.” (Peter, husband of recovered problem gambler)*

Stage of change	What you can do
<p><b>Pre-contemplation</b></p> <p>The person does not see there is a problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how the gambling behaviour impacts you. Be prepared as they may be defensive and unwilling to stop.</li> <li>• Focus on looking after yourself and putting in boundaries around acceptable behaviour.</li> <li>• Protect your family’s assets and income.</li> <li>• Seek counselling or financial advice for yourself if you feel you need it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Contemplation</b></p> <p>The person is beginning to consider the need for change. However, they are unsure of whether they want to change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the impact of gambling with the person. You can have a conversation about change but be careful to avoid pushing them into it. As tempting as it may feel, if you do this it may alienate them.</li> <li>• Speak honestly to your children.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Determination</b></p> <p>The person is open to change and willing to seek what resources are available to make that change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the person to research what assistance is available.</li> <li>• Provide encouragement and offer support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Action</b></p> <p>The person actively makes changes, for example, they have reduced or stopped their gambling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the person what support they would like from you.</li> <li>• Know the limit of how much you can assist them and set your own boundaries.</li> <li>• Offer to attend counselling with them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Maintenance</b></p> <p>The person has been able to maintain behaviour change for a significant period of time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some friends and family may experience relief and happiness at this point. Others may feel residual anger and hurt.</li> <li>• If you feel comfortable, speak to the person about your feelings or you can seek professional help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Slips and relapses</b></p> <p>The person falls back into gambling behaviour. This may be a one off, or a return to previous levels of gambling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand where the person is at so you can choose an appropriate response.</li> <li>• Recognise that slips and relapses are a normal part of the changing process.</li> <li>• Suggest a return to support services– whether it be counselling, support groups, or other treatment – if this has ceased.</li> </ul>

## What you can expect on the road to recovery

Recovery from problem gambling requires persistence, hard work, encouragement and commitment, and having the support of a family member or friend can result in a more successful recovery. There will be setbacks. Problem gambling is like an addiction, and there is a good chance the person affected by problem gambling will relapse. As a supporter, keep an eye out for relapse triggers such as anxiousness, anger, stress or depression. Here are some insights into what you can expect on the not so linear path to recovery.

Once a person affected by problem gambling is on the road to recovery, they often find there is a big gap in their lives that gambling used to fill. They have often lost the ability to socialise, and struggle to find balance. Supporting the person affected by problem gambling to slowly restore healthy routines and reconnect with other friends and family can help recovery.

Many people are ashamed of their gambling and will find admitting to the problem extremely difficult.

*"Did I want to tell people what was going on? Absolutely I did, but I was so scared of actually admitting to what I was doing... I had this nasty secret." (Thomas, recovered problem gambler)*

*"I knew I had a problem but I just couldn't stop and I was too embarrassed to tell anyone, too ashamed to tell anyone." (Julia, recovered problem gambler)*

Many people affected by problem gambling only seek help when they are close to, or at, rock bottom.

*"What changed me this time around was going into St Vincent's to ask for bread and milk. It was then I thought 'enough is enough'. (Patricia, recovering problem gambler)*

For some, their hand has to be forced before they will consider getting help or counselling.

*"The thing that actually pushed me over the line to seek help was nothing of my own doing. I wasn't able to stop. I was confronted, I was found out." (Thomas, recovered problem gambler)*

The process of getting the problem out in the open, and getting the person affected by problem gambling to agree to seek help can be extremely emotional and difficult. As a family member or friend, keep your focus on the road ahead. Recovery is possible, but it definitely isn't easy. However, remember many have been on the same journey and have recovered.

*"The important thing is to take action to help yourself and get help for the gambler. We see so many people who wait too long. It's like watching a slow motion train wreck. The sooner you take action the sooner you can get on the road to recovery." (Sarah, problem gambling counsellor)*

When a person does seek help, it doesn't necessarily mean he or she is ready to stop gambling. For many, the first step is to gain knowledge on how to control the problem. Don't expect that the first step will be a commitment to stop. It may be a commitment to control.

*"As a gambling counsellor I accept that. I'll say alright so that's where we'll start. We'll give you some strategies for harm minimisation. Limit the amount of money that you take with you when you go and gamble. Don't take your plastic cards with you when you go. Go with friends and tell your friends I'm only going to gamble this amount tonight. Choose to go to venues where you know you're not going to stay all night. Choose not to gamble with a group of mates who you know are heavy gamblers. And we talk about timeframes; how long do you want to try this out for?" (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)*



Relapse is a common part of the recovery process. If relapse occurs, try to understand the trigger – it could be a disappointment or a period of stress. It may happen early in the recovery process or it may happen after a few years.

*“I took three goes before I got it right. You need to stick at it.” (Penny, recovered problem gambler)*

Gambling is isolating, particularly given people affected by problem gambling spend much of their waking time either gambling, thinking about gambling or worrying about their gambling. As a result, they often lose connection with friends and family, and give up social activities and interests. Rebuilding this is an important step for recovery.

*“There’s another process that we identify and work with. What are you going to do now that you’re not gambling? What are you going to replace that with? It can be a grieving process. It’s an important part of the treatment we look at.*

*So we talk about the things that they did before they gambled. That may be sport. It may be simple things like going out with the family. It may be taking that significant other person in your life out and buying them a meal. It may be buying yourself that item you know you’d looked at so many times and yet the gambling was always more important. It may be reconnecting with family and friends that you haven’t spoken to for a long, long time. Many avoid this because they owe them money and feel ashamed. My experience is that those family members are just waiting to be spoken to.” (Peter, problem gambling counsellor)*



## Insights from problem gambling counsellors

Recovery can be a difficult part of the journey. For many, it doesn't come easily. But with persistence, there can be success.

*"Recovering from problem gambling is all about persistence. There is no easy way to do it. The person has to be committed to changing their behaviour and it is very helpful if the family is on board."*

Friends, family and partners can play a crucial role in helping a person affected by problem gambling overcome their addiction.

*"We see a lot of people who come without their partners and that is OK. But it is tough to do it on your own. We would like to see more family members and partners come along either on their own or with the gambler."*



When a loved one is struggling with the grips of a gambling addiction, it can be difficult to see a way out. But remember, while it isn't easy, people do recover from problem gambling and there is a range of support services available to help.

*"The best advice I can give family members is that you are not alone. There are services to help you and the problem gambler. It's not easy, but people do recover every day."*

Relapse is a very common part of recovery. It is important that you have supports in place to help you all deal with possible relapses. Importantly, don't give up. Complete and sustained recovery is possible.

*"In this field you're always aware that that person can relapse. But relapse is also part of recovery. "*

*"Counsellors say you plant the seed and you trust the process. Well that's what happens here. Sometimes we only have one session together, and you're not surprised when 12 months later you get a phone call saying can I come back and see you, didn't work. I say yeah mate, come on back. This is about hope. And in this field we see miracles."*

### More information

To find out more about problem gambling counselling visit the **Gambling Help Online** website (see page 18).

## Where you can go for further information or help

<b>Gambling Help Online</b>	<a href="http://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au">www.gamblinghelponline.org.au</a> Tel: 1800 858 858 (open 24 hours/7 days)
<b>Gambling Impact Society</b>	<a href="http://www.gisnsw.org.au">www.gisnsw.org.au</a>
<b>Gamblers Anonymous Gam-anon</b>	<a href="http://www.gansw.org.au">www.gansw.org.au</a>
<b><i>beyondblue</i></b>	<a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a> Tel: 1300 22 4636
<b>Lifeline</b>	<a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a> Tel: 131 114
<b>Relationships Australia</b>	<a href="http://www.relationshipsaustralia.org.au">www.relationshipsaustralia.org.au</a> Tel: 1300 364 277
<b>Financial Counselling Hotline</b>	Tel: 1800 007 007 <sup>17</sup>
<b>Canadian Problem Gambling Index</b>	<a href="http://www.problemgambling.ca/EN/Documents/ProblemGamblingSeverityIndex.pdf">www.problemgambling.ca/EN/Documents/ProblemGamblingSeverityIndex.pdf</a>
<b>State / Territory resources</b>	
Vic.	<a href="http://www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au">www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au</a>
SA	<a href="http://www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au">www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au</a>
NSW	<a href="http://www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au">www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au</a>
Qld	<a href="http://www.gamblinghelpservices.com.au">www.gamblinghelpservices.com.au</a>
NT	<a href="http://www.nt.gov.au/justice/licenreg">www.nt.gov.au/justice/licenreg</a>
ACT	<a href="http://www.problemgambling.act.gov.au">www.problemgambling.act.gov.au</a>
Tas.	<a href="http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/gambling">www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/gambling</a>
WA	<a href="http://www.rgl.wa.gov.au/Default.aspx?NodId=80">www.rgl.wa.gov.au/Default.aspx?NodId=80</a>
<b>Australian Government</b>	<a href="http://www.problemgambling.gov.au">www.problemgambling.gov.au</a>

### Acknowledgements

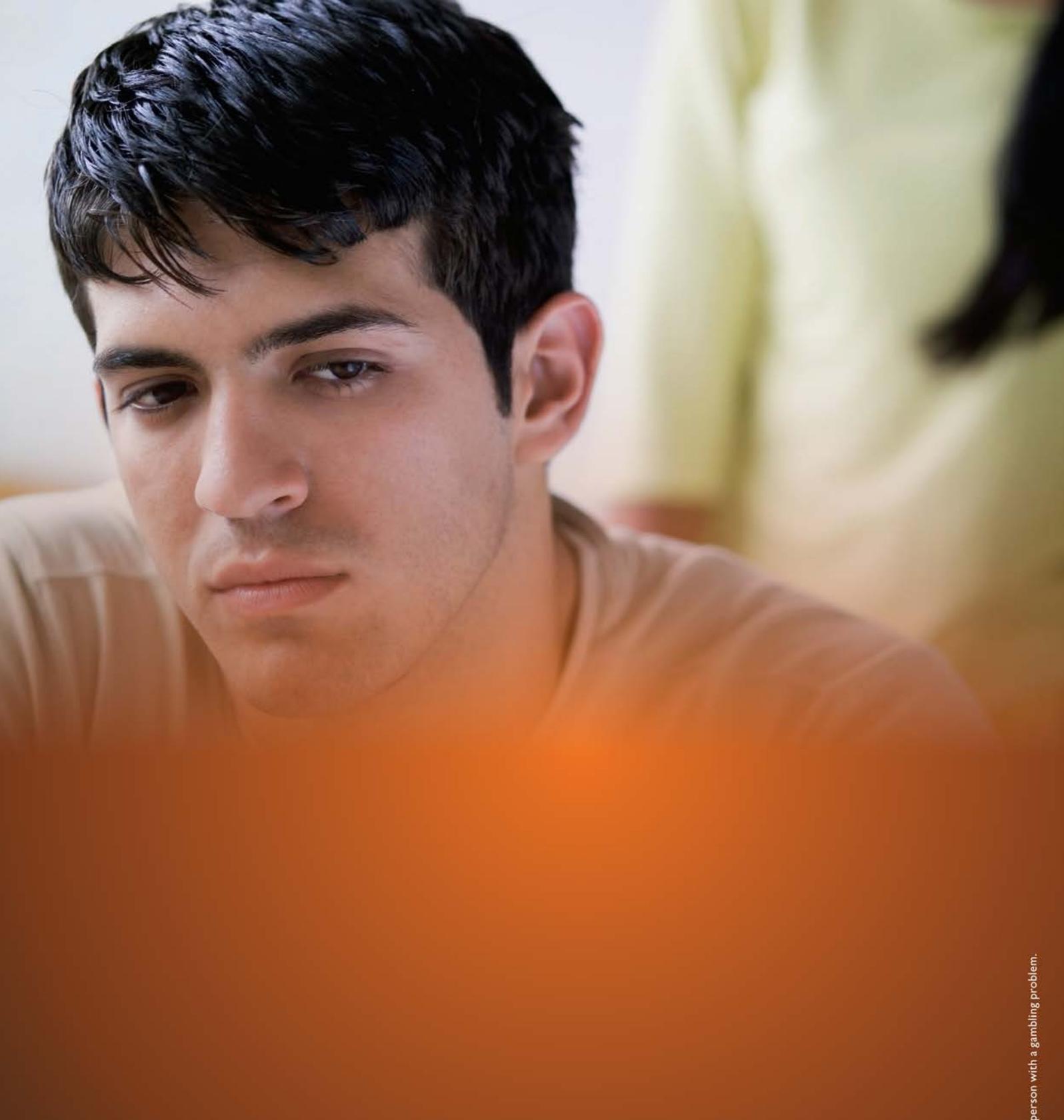
In some cases, names have been changed for privacy reasons.

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The Australian Government acknowledges the support of the Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc, and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Canada) for the use of content from their own problem gambling resources.

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<sup>17</sup> calls from public phones/mobile phones may be timed and charged at a higher rate



**DO YOU NEED HELP?**

For advice and support,  
visit [www.gamblinghelpoline.org.au](http://www.gamblinghelpoline.org.au)  
or call 1800 858 858

For further information visit:

**[www.problemgambling.gov.au](http://www.problemgambling.gov.au)**